



During his military career, Miami, Arizona native Hector "Jim" Santa Anna would earn two Distinguished Service Medals, five Air Medals, and a Commendation Medal.

A name with a past

*Despite great-great uncle's dark legacy
Hispanic flyboys are American Patriots*

BY ANITA MABANTE LEACH
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It is a famous surname. One that might bring out the chest-thumping nature of more than a few righteous Texans, if not for the fact that these two Arizona-born brothers named Santa Anna are patriots of a legendary American—not Mexican—war.

Yes, in fact, they are the descendants of that Santa Anna, as in Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna Perez de Lebron, the infamous general and on-again, off-again Mexican president who rubbed out a rag-tag band of insurgents at a certain rebel-occupied presidio in 1836.

You remember—the Alamo?

Otto and Hector “Jim” Santa Anna are the sons of Jose Maria Santa Anna, who was one of the general’s six nephews born in Silver City, New Mexico. After marrying Carmen Galindo in Deming, New Mexico, Jose settled his family in Miami in 1918 and went to work for the mines. He and many other minority miners endured harsh conditions and discrimination.

“He worked for Miami Copper and one time this man came up to him and told my dad he had to pay 50 cents a day to work there,” recalls Otto, the youngest of three brothers. “He fought back and got fired. That was common practice.”

A SERIOUS DECISION

Otto, Jim and Constantino, an older brother now deceased, attended a segregated elementary school in Miami, but later went to a desegregated high school. It was just after Jim and his high school classmates graduated that the Second World War in Europe began to stir. The young men learned from their former football coach what it would mean to them.

“I wanted to join the Navy and my father was absolutely against it,” Jim said. “He said, ‘I want you to go to work and get some college.’ But I couldn’t do it, although I did

go to Arizona State Teachers College in Tempe for one semester.”

Jim moved to Oxnard, Calif., and took a job as a miner to earn money for college. While there, he visited the air base and watched planes take off and land. “I decided this is what I wanted to do,” he said. Soon, he was in the Air Corps Aviation Cadets, one of the very few Hispanics selected for the elite training program.

“I went to basic, then advance training in Brooks Field in San Antonio. I got my wings on July 28, 1943, exactly one year to the day that I had volunteered and gotten into the service.”

CLOSE CALL

Jim’s bilingual skills helped him land a key job as a flight trainer, teaching other Hispanics to fly various types of planes. Latin Americans, includ-

Hector Santa Anna retired in 1985 and lives with his wife, Olive, in Delaware.

ing many Mexican nationals, fought in the war for the United States, entitling them to apply for U.S. citizenship later. As the air war over Europe escalated, Jim, a 1st Lieutenant, flew his crew through 35 missions and several airplanes, including Bachelor’s Delight. The B-17G, which the crew flew through 16 missions, was damaged by enemy flak



Hector Santa Anna, kneeling, far left, was a bomber pilot for the crew of “Bachelor’s Delight.”

on Feb. 25, 1945. Despite the loss of an engine, leaking gas tanks, and shot-out radio, oxygen system, elevator controls and tires, Jim managed to keep the plane airborne until they were guided to a Belgian allied airfield where he crash-landed. For actions such as this, Jim would earn two Distinguished Service Medals, five Air Medals and a Commendation Medal.

Jim kept flying and training others to fly, and he was again called into action when U.S. planes flew medicine, food and fuel to West Berliners, after Soviets cut access to that part of the city for 11 months during the start of the Cold War in 1948. He later served as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs at the Pentagon. He was tapped to orchestrate the opening of Dulles Airport in Washington, D.C. After retiring from the Air Force in 1964, Jim went on to work for NASA, opening the Space Exhibit in Melbourne, Australia. He retired from the FAA in 1985 and returned to flying airplanes.

He and his wife, Olive, now live in Dover, Delaware. The couple have two daughters: Sylvia, a high school teacher who speaks both Spanish and Italian; and Cynthia, who is fluent in French, Spanish and Arabic, and works in Lebanon.

CIVIC DUTY, MIAMI STYLE

Otto, like his brother Jim, chose to join the Air Corps. He was the youngest of the brothers, born in October 1927.

"I quit (high school) in the middle of my senior year to join," he said. "I had just turned 18." Otto eventually was part of the Fifth Air Force used during the Occupation in Japan. "The Cold War was coming, so I was setting up radar sites."

He stayed in the reserves until 1965, rising to the rank of Staff Sergeant. Once home, he worked as an apprentice at Southern Pacific Railroad in Tucson earning \$11 a day. Remembering his father's struggles as a miner, Otto moved back to Miami to work.

"I worked as a teamster negotiator for a long time and I made a lot of changes, making bosses out of Hispanics," Otto said. Strikes would sometimes last months.

Otto's experience as a negotiator motivated him to serve on boards for foster care, a local college, and a health organization. He helped to spearhead a voter registration drive in 1961 that eventually drove out corrupt elements from the town's police department. Then beginning in 1962 he would give 24 years of service to Miami's Town Council. His best-known civic accomplishment is the saving of his old elementary school that was scheduled for demolition.

"We finally got a lease on the school and opened it as a museum. It features (Miami's) schools, mining, cattlemen and GI history," he said with pride. "I did it simply because I needed my four kids to get an education and to understand they weren't going to be pushed around," Otto said.

He and his wife, Alma, have four children:



Otto, left, and his wife, Alma with Hector at a Miami High School reunion in 1996.

PLAYING THE NAME GAME

As for that famous last name, the Santa Anna brothers are without affectation.

"We only know that he is our great-great uncle," Otto said simply. He's never visited the Alamo.

Jim, however, has had brushes with his ancestral notoriety, beginning in his early cadet training days in Texas.

"In December of 1942, I was at the ground school in San Antonio," Jim recalled. "And, of course, we were kept in school for about a month or so. So when we got the first weekend off, I went to the Alamo. I wanted to see it so badly.

"I walked in. I had my cadet uniform on. This woman, who was handling all the visitors, said, 'Mister, sign in here.'" She motioned Jim to a guest book for visitors.

"I put down 'Hector Santa Anna.' She took one look at it and said, 'Mister, we don't play games around here.'

"I pulled out my I.D. 'Oh! My God!' she said. 'I'm terribly sorry!'" The woman motioned the other docents to come over to meet a descendant of the famous general.

A newspaper story followed.

"The following week, I got 300 letters about 'Santa Anna returning to the Alamo,'" Jim said, chuckling. LP



Miami, Arizona native Otto Santa Anna in 1947.